

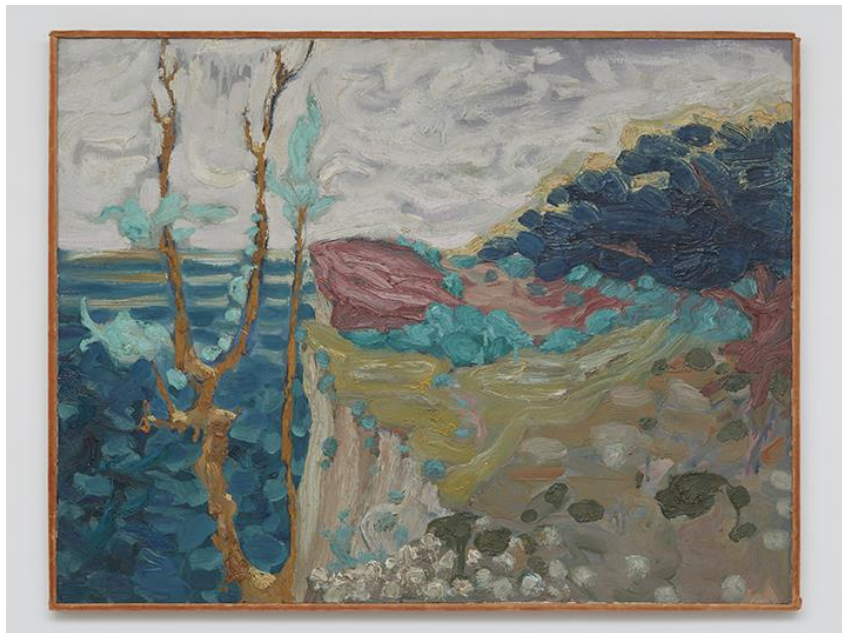
TIBOR DE NAGY

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Jess

A Fairy Tale Landscape, paintings and drawing from the 1950s

September 19 to October 25, 2020



Jess (Collins) *A Wish in the Form of a Landscape*, 1954

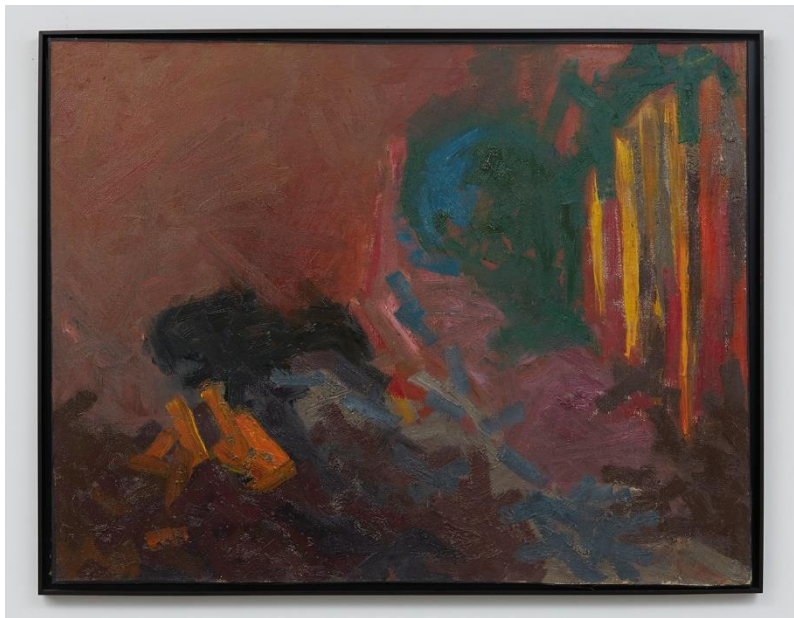
Tibor de Nagy is pleased to announce *Jess – A Fairytale Landscape, paintings and drawings from the 1950s*. This exhibition will present a group of thirteen paintings and drawings from Jess's Romantic period which dates to the early years in his life as an artist. This will be the first exhibition solely devoted to the Romantic works.

In the late 1940s, Jess studied painting at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute.) His teachers included some of the most important West Coast painters of the period, including Edward Corbett, David Park, Elmer Bischoff, and Clyfford Still. Upon graduating and influenced by his teachers Jess created many still-life, portrait and landscapes paintings. During this time, he experimented with painting techniques – some works are thickly painted and boldly gestural while others are luminous and layered. In these works, Jess pursued mythic and literary subject matter, a way of working that would consume him for decades to come. In particular, the landscape and non-objective works became a perfect device to employ storytelling and complex allegories. These works can be depictions of a remembered places or imaginary backdrops for drama or legend.



Jess (Collins) *Mary Butts Landscape*, 1953

It is during this time, Jess met the poet Robert Duncan, who would become his lifelong partner and frequent collaborator. Their lives revolved around art and literature, and they became an influential force in the San Francisco artistic community. One painting in the exhibition, *Mary Butts Landscape* from 1953 reflects their love of neglected romantic literature. The British novelist Mary Butts was the great granddaughter of Thomas Butts, the patron of William Blake. Jess painted *Mary Butts's Landscape* over a found thrift store painting of two Dutch Milkmaids. Butts's writing mirrored Jess's interests in that she interwove ancient myth and ritual with a deeply felt spirituality that leaned towards the surreal. Jess spoke of this painting to the art historian Michael Auping "Butts's landscapes were very allegorical to my mind, and as I recall I wanted to take the sentiment of the original painting, which I actually found to be quiet joyous and show that there could be many other things going on in that landscape, which is essentially what Butts did in her novels. I suppose the final painting could refer to the unsure journey of the artist as much as it does an adventure through a fantasy landscape."



Jess (Collins) *A Fairy Tale Landscape*, 1951

Jess (1923-2004) was born Burgess Collins in Long Beach, California, he initially studied chemistry at the California Institute of Technology. He spent three years in the army at the Atomic Energy Laboratory, and had a small part in the Manhattan Project developing the first atom bomb. Following the war, while working again with atomic energy, he became disillusioned with science after having a nightmare about the world destroying itself, and instead turned to art. Jess and Robert Duncan lived together in the Mission District of San Francisco for over thirty years – their house, which Jess seldom left, was filled with a vast and incredible range of visual and literary culture, including Gnostic texts, Greek poetry, volumes of *Scientific American*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Life* magazines, as well as first and early editions of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Duncan said of their home, "you can't take a piss in this house without getting hit with a myth."



Jess (Collins) *On Corbett's Dismissal*, 1951

Jess was recently the focus of the exhibition *Mythos, Psyche, Eros – Jess in California* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2019, curated by Nancy Lim and Solomon Adler. Jess is in the collection of most major museums including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Art Institute of Chicago, and the Detroit Institute of Art among many others.

The gallery is open Wednesday to Saturday 10-6 and Sunday 12-6, you can drop in or make an appointment on our website or by calling 212-262-5050